

**GLORY, GLORY,
HALLELUJAH!**



Gift of
Lester S. Levy

**GLORY, GLORY,
HALLELUJAH!**

Harry
Best Season's
Greetings! to you
both!
Bradley Wash

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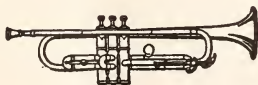


SERGEANT JOHN BROWN OF BOSTON

The original John Brown of the John Brown Song. He was drowned while crossing the Rappahannock, June, 1862.

GLORY, GLORY, HALLELUJAH!

the story of
"JOHN BROWN'S BODY"
and
"Battle Hymn of the Republic"



Boyd B. Stutler

BOYD B. STUTLER

The author of our Christmas Greeting this year is a native West Virginian presently residing in Charleston. After more than fifty years devoted to newspaper and magazine work he is now more or less retired.

From 1936 to 1954 he was managing editor of "The American Legion Magazine" New York, and editor of the "National Legionnaire" Indianapolis, Ind. from 1942 to 1944.

Mr. Stutler is a veteran of World War I and saw active service in France. He was a war correspondent in the Asiatic-Pacific theater in 1944 and 1945. He returned home to Charleston after retirement in 1954 and became President of the West Virginia Historical Society for the years 1958 and 1959. He is currently a member of the West Virginia Civil War Centennial Commission.

He has been a student of the John Brown story for nearly fifty years and has amassed a collection of John Brown memorabilia and related materials numbering well over 7, 000 items. His writings on John Brown have embraced more than forty magazine and feature articles. He is singularly well qualified to write The John Brown Story.

A sketch of his life is embodied in Who's Who in America.

ORATORY AND SHIBBOLETH have played large roles in stirring up the passions of people in times of great stress. "Remember the Raisin," "Remember the Alamo," "Remember the Maine" all contributed in great measure to the declarations of the conflicts that followed.

Song, on the other hand, provided much of the driving force which made men suffer untold hardships and death in defense of country and fireside. "Dixie," "John Brown's Body," "Hinky, Dinky, Parley-voo" from the lusty throats of the marchers, heightened by the rhythmic beat of the drum accelerated the tramp of marching feet and lightened the burden.

In the conflict between the North and South the repetitious lines of "John Brown's Body" was continuously heard over the broad expanse of Northern Field and Camp.

We hope this little sketch of the song's genesis will provide a few minutes of pleasurable and profitable reading.

RUTH and BRADLEY NASH

PUT into one sum the times the name of Lincoln, the Martyred President, and Grant, the Peerless General, have been uttered and it would not make a hundredth part the number of times that represent the utterance of John Brown's name in this song." That was the enthusiastic estimate of Alfred S. Roe in 1883, written at a time when there were probably more people in America who could sing "John Brown's body" than any other song or hymn.

However startling that statement may be, his estimate had an element of great probability, for "John Brown's body" was the mighty war song that had roared its way from first to last through all the four years of the Civil War — and it was carried over with but little loss of popularity into the immediate post-war years. It was a song for

the camp and field, and for the long marches — but it also caught the popular fancy of the folks at home. If we are to believe the contemporary writing in newspapers and letters, the song was heard everywhere: in homes, at public meetings and on the streets in the Northern and Mid-western States. Indeed the records also disclose that its popularity spread to foreign lands where it was sung in English and in alien languages.

Set to the easy swing of a simple old Methodist air, slightly jazzed up, which was well known to the great mass of church-going people, with a beat that made it an almost perfect marching tune, the “doggerel” verses of the original composition contained all the elements of simplicity and sentiment. There was a touch of humor, and, all in all, it had everything essential to reflect the patriotic frenzy of the early months of the war. Once launched, the John Brown song rolled on like a great snowball, gaining favor and at the same time collecting some scores of variant lyrics set to the same metrical measure. The greatest of these — Julia Ward Howe’s “Battle Hymn of the Republic” — has worn well through the years as a minor national anthem. That is the John Brown song in its glorified form.

The origin of the song has been curiously confused and involved by mythmakers, uninformed writers, and by some dozen or more false claimants to the composition of both words and music. But the story is made quite clear by careful research through the newspapers of the Civil War period, old records and by reading through a mass of contemporary letters. The most amazing feature — not, however, one of recent discovery is that John Brown, the militant anti-slavery crusader whose name had been impressed upon the public consciousness by his raid on Harpers Ferry and his execution at Charles Town, now in West Virginia, on December 2, 1859, was not the John Brown of the original song! But to the great Northern public there was but one John Brown — he of Ossawatimie and Harpers Ferry — and the song was accepted as a tribute to the man whose anti-slavery raid was one of the principal contributing causes of the war.

The protagonist was young Sergeant John Brown of Boston. So John Brown, the raider, got his song under a public misconception. It was this circumstance that caused Dr. Frank H. Hodder, of the University of Kansas, to write that the posthumous fame of John Brown came about partly as the



JOHN BROWN OF OSSAWATOMIE

Pencil sketch by Wm. Morris Stutler from photograph made by J. W. Black, Boston, in May, 1859.

result of propaganda and partly as the result of the "accident" of the "John Brown song."

II.

When the Confederates fired on Fort Sumter war fever was worked up to a white heat in Boston. Young men flocked to the headquarters of the organized military units to enlist for immediate service in the South. Among these were some dozens of young Bostonians who made their way to the headquarters of the 2nd Battalion, Boston Light Infantry, Massachusetts Volunteer Militia, an old unit popularly known as "The Tigers." Organized in 1798, the "Tiger" companies had been maintained very largely for social and ceremonial purposes. So many enlistments were made in the first few days after Sumter that a new company was formed and on April 29, 1861, under command of Major Ralph W. Newton, the battalion was ordered to occupy Fort Warren, one of the defenses in Boston Harbor.

In one of the companies was a young Scotchman who bore the suggestive name of John Brown, and it was inevitable that because of this name he would become the butt of jokes and witticisms by his

comrades. "Where's John Brown?" some one would ask. "John Brown is not here! He's dead!" would likely be the response. "What's the news?" would be asked of men returning to the fort from town leave. "John Brown's dead — but he's a pretty lively corpse to go marching around," was the usual response. This form of baiting went on for several days, the subject bearing up to the bantering with his customary good humor. Sometimes he was irritated by the barbs and sputtered out his displeasure.

There was also in the three companies of the battalion a number of good singers and a choral group was formed, usually referred to as a quartet, but as the impromptu organization was flexible there were usually eight to twelve voices in the ensemble — including the voice of John Brown as second tenor. Others in the group were Newton Pernette, James H. Jenkins, Charles E. B. Edgerly, James E. Greenleaf, Gurdon S. Brown, Louis N. Tucker, Caleb E. Niebuhr, Henry J. Hallgreen, and others whose names have not been preserved. One of the favorite songs was an old Methodist hymn beginning "Say, brothers, will you meet us?", one line for each verse repeated three times with

a tag-line "On Canaan's happy shore." The grand old "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah" chorus was an especial favorite.

In the process of bantering Sergeant John Brown one of the men, said to have been Henry J. Hallgreen, came up with the line "John Brown's body lies moldering in the grave." This was instantly seized by Greenleaf, who in private life was organist of the Harvard Church in Charlestown, who added a tag-line "His soul's marching on!" and adapted the impromptu composition to the tune of "Say, brothers, will you meet us?" Some little tinkering was needed to quicken the music — or jazz it up — to make it conform to the "doggerel" lines. The old Methodist chorus was left unchanged; it was too good to be tampered with. Thus was born the first verse of "John Brown's Body," or "The John Brown Song" as it was first known. The balance of the song was hammered out in folk-song fashion at Fort Warren over a period of several weeks.

The air was an easy one that required no vocal gymnastics; it was made to order for untrained voices, and with a regiment on the march it could be roared out in such volume as to shake the walls of Jericho. It was also easy of improvisation — one smart line to be repeated three times, with either

JOHN BROWN SONG!

John Brown's body lies a mouldering in the grave,
John Brown's body lies a mouldering in the grave,
John Brown's body lies a mouldering in the grave,
His soul's marching on!

CHORUS.

Glory Hally, Hallelujah! Glory Hally Hallelujah! Glory Hally Hallelujah!

His soul's marching on!

He's gone to be a soldier in the army of the Lord,
He's gone, &c.
He's gone, &c.

His soul's marching on!

CHORUS.

Glory Hally, Hallelujah! &c.

His soul's marching on!

John Brown's knapsack is strapped upon his back—
John Brown's, &c.
John Brown's, &c.

His soul's marching on!

CHORUS.

Glory Hally, Hallelujah! &c.

His soul's marching on!

His pet lambs will meet him on the way—
His pet lambs, &c.
His pet lambs, &c.
They go marching on!

CHORUS.

Glory Hally, Hallelujah! &c.

They go marching on!

They will hang Jeff Davis to a tree!
They will hang, &c.
They will hang, &c.
As they march along?

CHORUS.

Glory, Hally, Hallelujah! &c.

As they march along!

Now, three rousing cheers for the Union!
Now, &c.
Now, &c.

As we are marching on!

CHORUS.

Glory Hally, Hallelujah! Glory Hally, Hallelujah! Glory Hally, Hallelujah!

Hip, Hip, Hip, Hip, Hurrah!

Published at No. 256 Main Street,

CHARLESTOWN, MASS.

JOHN BROWN SONG

First Printing as originated at Ft. Warren in Boston Harbor. Only one copy is known to exist.

the old or a new tag-line — and new verses were being constantly added as the men of the battalion snake-danced around the parade each evening. Probably more lines had been added to the original verse before the song reached its larger audience than soldiers in the AEF in World War I hooked on to the immensely popular “Hinky, Dinky, Parley-voo.”

The extemporized lines grew in number day by day, ranging from the ribald to the sublime, but all were centered on the acts and movements of the little Scotch Sergeant, with special emphasis on his “deadness” and his ability to go marching ’round. These were young men, full of fun and frolic and bubbling over with animal spirits. They had not yet come to a full knowledge of the business of war; they had not been hardened by long marches on short rations, nor had they known the mud and muck of a battlefield. They had not dodged bullets, suffered wounds, or seen the mangled bodies of their comrades torn beyond recognition by screeching shells. To them the war was still a lark, and a release from the routine of their every day lives.

The iron had not yet entered into their souls, and in their good natured way they had not come

to the thought of hanging Jeff Davis to any kind of a tree. So the original lines promising punishment to the erring President of the Southern Confederacy ran:

“We’ll feed him on sour apples till he has
the di-ar-rhee!”

But when time came to put the song into print the line was thought too harsh for delicate mid-Victorian ears, it was “softened” to “They will hang Jeff Davis to a tree!” And still later, after experimenting with “very first,” “crab apple,” “palmetto” and other kinds of trees, the words “sour apple” were inserted in order to fill out the meter. Dozens of other unrecorded and now forgotten verses were extemporized — perhaps not the best of them have been preserved.

True, there were many John Brown songs dating from the Harpers Ferry raid days in the fall of 1859 and long before the advent of the Fort Warren creation. These were usually sung to some well known tune, such as “Run, Tell Aunt Susey,” “The Happy Land of Canaan,” “John Anderson My Jo.,” and there was at least one original composition by Charles E. Hering, set to a

poem by Clarence Edmund Stedman, which attained the dignity of sheet music publication in New York in late November, 1859.

After the break of hostilities in April, 1861, and even before the "Tigers" were sent to Fort Warren, tunesmiths of the 4th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, then stationed at Fort Monroe, Virginia, had devised a John Brown song to the melody of "The Grave of Uncle True," a well known ballad of the Uncle Tom-Little Eva type dating from 1854, which had its inspiration in Maria S. Cummins' immensely popular novel, *The Lamplighter*. A correspondent of the *Boston Journal*, writing from Fort Monroe Virginia, under date of April 23, quoted one verse:

"May Heaven's rays look kindly down,
Upon the grave of Old John Brown!"

And this "Uncle True" version was sung at a meeting at John Brown's grave at North Elba, New York, on July 4th, 1861.

That this John Brown song spread through the army very quickly is established by other newspaper references. A correspondent of the *Boston Journal*, who signed his dispatches "Burleigh," writing from Charles Town (West) Virginia, under

date of July 19, 1861, told of soldiers of the 29th New York Infantry gathering daily at the site of John Brown's execution to annoy the townspeople by singing a song, "the refrain of which is:

"May Heaven's smiles look kindly down
Upon the grave of Old John Brown."

Though not included in the first printed versions, this fragment — all that has been preserved of the "Uncle True" song — was accepted by the "Tigers" at Fort Warren, and was later incorporated in the printed song sheets and sheet music issues.

As the song began to spread beyond the confines of the island fort, Major Newton became very unhappy — he feared that the public would take the song as a tribute to the old anti-slavery crusader of Kansas and Harpers Ferry. This did not please him at all; he feared that his beloved "Tigers" would be tainted with the stigma of abolitionism. To cure matters he suggested that some other name be substituted if the men wanted "to howl that John Brown tune" constantly. But it was not until May 24 — two days before the "Tigers" were relieved from duty at Fort Warren — that another sacrificial hero was provided in the person

of Colonel Elmer E. Ellsworth, of the New York Fire Zouaves and a protege of President Lincoln, who was shot dead while pulling down a Confederate flag at Alexandria, Virginia.

Lines commemorating Colonel Ellsworth and his untimely death were improvised and sung with zest — “We lament the death of Colonel Ellsworth,” “Colonel Ellsworth’s death we will avenge,” “When Ellsworth died he died like a brave,” “His pet lambs will meet him on the way,” and many other verses. But the effort to substitute Ellsworth’s name fell flat; the John Brown song had taken hold. The singers knew nothing of Sergeant John Brown of Boston — it was John Brown of Ossawatimie and Harpers Ferry that they sang about. Only the “pet lambs” verse was retained when the song was committed to print as a reminder of the effort to switch the names. It must be said, however, that some of the early sheet music publishers bracketed the names of John Brown and Colonel Ellsworth in order to give the singer a choice of national hero to commemorate.

It was at a flag-raising ceremony at Fort Warren on Sunday, May 12th, when the new creation was given its first public rendition by William J.

Martland's Brockton Band, which was designated as the Brigade Band. Greenleaf, the organist, had prepared a score and with the aid of a comrade who played the cornet the tune was whistled and tooted to Samuel C. Perkins, a member of the Brockton Band, who adapted it for band use. At the raising of the flag, after an impassioned patriotic address by the chaplain, Rev. George Hepworth, the band struck up the tune and the men joined in singing their crude verses. It created something of a sensation. Patrick Sarsfield Gilmore's Band — later to win world-wide fame — which alternated with the Brockton Band at the fort, took the tune to Boston to enliven parades and military reviews.

Though the 2nd Battalion had offered its services to the Union as a unit, the proffer was rejected because of an order that permitted only regimental organizations of not less than ten companies to be accepted. The fort was filled up with the newly recruited companies of the 12th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, commanded by Colonel Fletcher Webster — a son of Daniel Webster — and on May 26th the "Tigers" were relieved and ordered to return to Boston. Many of the men liked their brief taste of military life —

and still filled to overflowing with patriotic fervor — rushed to enlist in the 12th, or to take a transfer from their enlistment in the 2nd Battalion. Among these men were Jenkins, Edgerly, Pernette, John Brown and other members of the “Tiger” choral group. Thus the 12th Massachusetts became heir to the John Brown song, and it is to that regiment that its origin is generally credited.

Boston heard the John Brown song sung on the march by the 12th on July 18th when it was reviewed on Boston Common and received a flag from the ladies of the city. Edward Everett, Boston’s old man eloquent, made the presentation address, which was responded to by Colonel Webster. After what seemed an interminably long time, but really too short to train raw recruits, the 12th left for the front on July 23rd, hard on the heels of the defeat and rout of the Union forces at First Bull Run. Boston heard the song again, and on the following day — on July 24th — the 12th made its greatest impression when it marched down Broadway in New York City roaring the wild strains of “John Brown’s Body.”

The New York papers commented at length on the march and particularly on the rendition of the song. The *Chicago Tribune*, August 9, 1861, — after

the song had reached the shores of Lake Michigan — in a lengthy comment said: “It is a queer medley, but the soldiers like it and sing it with great energy to an old camp meeting melody. The Virginians will think that John Brown is worshipped as a Northern hero, in spite of all denials, if even Fletcher Webster’s Boston troops sing a song as this. So on all hands providence seems to be involving slavery with the war, notwithstanding the most sincere efforts of patriotism and statesmanship to keep the constitutional lines distinct.”

It was the New York march that gave the regiment the nickname “Hallelujah Regiment” — and it was really this triumphant march that gave the impetus and started the “John Brown song” on its eternal way.

The 12th Massachusetts reached Harpers Ferry on July 28th and Charles Town a couple of days later — scenes of John Brown’s defeat and execution — where the song was rendered with special fervor. It had become an accepted part of the war effort. The name of John Brown of Boston was completely submerged, though the little Sergeant had but a short time left to go marching

'round. He was drowned while crossing the Rapahannock River on June 6, 1862.

While the song quickly caught public attention, it was slow in reaching the public prints. The first instance of a line published in a newspaper is found in the *New York Sunday Mercury* for July 21, 1861 — just three days before the Broadway march — when a Boston police court incident was reported by a correspondent. Johnny Rounders, who had taken aboard too much New England rum, was haled into court. The arresting officer testified that he had created a disturbance by singing uproariously “John Brown’s bones hang dangling in the air,” and finished off with the hallelujah chorus. The complete song was first printed in the *New York Tribune*, July 28th, as a follow-up to the story of the Broadway march.

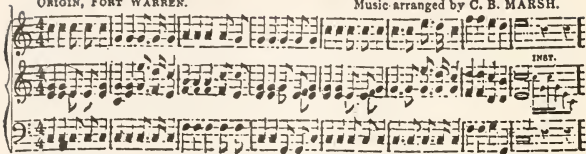
But even before the semi-humorous line about Brown’s skeletal remains got into print Greenleaf had enlisted the aid of C. S. Hall, of Charlestown, Massachusetts, to put the song into shape for formal presentation to the public. From the dozens of verses submitted, Hall selected five and added a verse of his own composition. The five selected were:



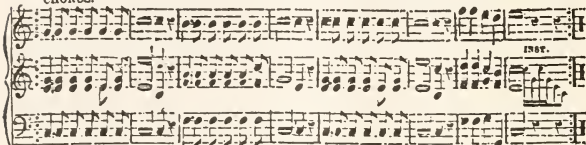
John Brown.

ORIGIN, FORT WARREN.

Music arranged by C. B. MARSH.



CHORUS.



- 1 John Brown's body lies a mouldering in the grave,
John Brown's body lies a mouldering in the grave,
John Brown's body lies a mouldering in the grave.
His soul's marching on!

CHORUS.

Glory, Hally, Hallelujah! Glory, Hally,
Hallelujah! Glory, Hally, Hallelujah!
His soul's marching on!

- 2 He's gone to be a soldier in the army of the Lord,
He's gone to be a soldier in the army of the Lord,
He's gone to be a soldier in the army of the Lord,
His soul's marching on!

CHORUS.

Glory, Hally, Hallelujah! &c.
His soul's marching on!

- 3 John Brown's knapsack is strapped upon his back—
John Brown's knapsack is strapped upon his back—
John Brown's knapsack is strapped upon his back—
His soul's marching on!

CHORUS
Glory, Hally, Hallelujah! &c.
His soul's marching on!

- 4 His pet lambs will meet him on the way—
His pet lambs will meet him on the way—
His pet lambs will meet him on the way—
They go marching on!

CHORUS.

Glory, Hally, Hallelujah! &c.
They go marching on!

- 5 They will hang Jeff Davis to a tree!
They will hang Jeff Davis to a tree!
They will hang Jeff Davis to a tree!
As they march along!

CHORUS.

Glory, Hally, Hallelujah! &c.
As they march along!

- 6 Now, three rousing cheers for the Union!
Now, three rousing cheers for the Union!
Now, three rousing cheers for the Union!
As we are marching on!

CHORUS.

Glory, Hally, Hallelujah! Glory, Hally
Hallelujah! Glory, Hally, Hallelujah!
Hip, Hip, Hip, Hip, Hurray!

Published by C. S. HALL, 256 MAIN STREET, CHARLESTOWN, MASS.

Noted, according to Act of Congress. In the year 1861, by C. S. HALL, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

JOHN BROWN SONG

Second Printing and first with Music. Only three copies are known to exist one of which is owned by the author.

“John Brown’s body lies mouldering in the grave.” This was the first verse suggested by Hallgreen as a jibe at Sergeant John Brown of Boston.

“He’s gone to be a soldier in the army of the Lord.” Still Sergeant Brown, borrowing a pet expression from the army chaplains who constantly referred to the Union volunteers as “the army of the Lord.”

“John Brown’s knapsack is strapped upon his back.” Again Sergeant Brown, a short, stout chap who had considerable difficulty in adjusting his knapsack and blanket roll. The next line, rejected, told of its content: “It is filled with leaden bullets and moldy hardtack.”

“His pet lambs will meet him on the way.” This is the sole vestige of the effort to inject Ellsworth’s name into the song. His regiment, the New York Fire Zouaves, was nicknamed “Ellsworth’s pet lambs.”

“They will hang Jeff Davis to a tree,” is a refinement of the earlier promise to feed him on sour apples until overtaken with the resultant

abdominal disturbance. As originally printed the line was too short for the meter; "sour apple" was inserted in later printings.

And, sixthly, the song was completed with Hall's "Now three rousing cheers for the Union," a verse that lasted through the war but was discarded in post-war years. The "Glory, Hally, Hallelujah" chorus was rendered after each verse, though in subsequent printings it became "Glory, Glory Hallelujah." In all it was, as Richard Grant White said, a "senseless farrago," but it was set to an air that "stuck to the ears like burrs to the skirt of a blackberry girl."

Hall published his selection on a 6 x 9-inch penny ballad sheet under the title "John Brown Song," and bearing only the imprint "Published at 256 Main Street, Charlestown, Mass." This issue quickly sold out when offered on the streets of Boston — today only one copy is known to have survived, that in the Boston Public Library. The quick sale of the ballad sheet, and the evident interest on the part of the public, encouraged Hall to bring out a more elaborate issue with both words and music. He employed C. B. Marsh, a well known Charlestown musician, to make an arrangement of the music to fit the lyric and in

mid-July brought out the second issue on half-sheet note paper, bearing an eagle and arrows at the top, no border, and with the simple title "John Brown." At the head of the music the source was given as "Origin, Fort Warren," and "Music arranged by C. B. Marsh." At the bottom the name of C. S. Hall was added to the imprint, and a copyright notice was inserted. This copyright, as ascertained from the original record in the Library of Congress, was dated July 16, 1861. Only three copies of this issue of the broadside song are known to exist.

Quick to scent a popular hit, music publishers grabbed the little sheet and started their presses to rolling out the John Brown song literally by the thousands, under various titles. The record in the Library of Congress discloses that four copyrights for the identical song — starting with the Hall broadside on July 16 — were issued within eight days by the Clerk of the Massachusetts Federal District Court. The other three were:

July 19, 1861 — "The Popular John Brown Song. . . Partly Written, Composed and Arranged by Frank Wilder." This copyright was taken in the name of J. W. Turner.

July 20 — “John Brown Song. Music by Philip Simonds.” Copyrighted and published by Russell & Patee.

July 24 — “The Popular Refrain of Glory, Hallelujah. As Sung by Federal Volunteers throughout the Union.” Copyrighted and published by Oliver Ditson & Co. No credit for music arrangement is given. This sheet music has the first traced appearance of the “stars of Heaven” verse from the “Grave of Uncle True,” which had its origin with the 4th Massachusetts Infantry at Fort Monroe, Virginia.

In all, from first to last, before the war dragged wearily to its close some sixty-five separate pieces of sheet music on the John Brown-Glory, Hallelujah theme had been issued by music publishers ranging across the country from Boston to San Francisco. Penny song sheets were put out without number, and every pocket songster, of which many were printed and sold, contained the “John Brown Song” and usually two or more variant lyrics set to the same air.

III.

If the story of the origin of “John Brown’s Body” is confused and complicated, that of the composi-

tion of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" seems crystal clear and well documented. Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, herself, told the story many times in her talks, and in her books and magazine articles, usually deftly injecting a note of mysticism into the narrative to account for her inspiration. But when sifted down it would seem that her inspiration came from a deliberate purpose to write a lyric that would give dignity, strength and patriotic fervor to the air of "John Brown's Body," then the most popular song arising from the war. And well did she succeed.

Mrs. Howe, the wife of Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe, Boston reformer and philanthropist who had been a member of the "Secret Six" committee brought together by John Brown, had earned some literary reputation in her own right some years before the war. She had written poems and published books, and she moved in the most elite social and literary circles in Boston and New York. She was deeply concerned with public questions, the war effort, and a varied assortment of reforms. Her approach, then, to song-writing was not that of a novice.

When hostilities opened in April, 1861, Dr. Howe was named a member of the National Sanitary



JULIA WARD HOWE

Commission, a body organized under the Government for service and relief of the men in the armed forces and for members of their families — a sort of grandfather of the wartime welfare groups we came to know so well in the two World Wars. In November, 1861, together with a group of Boston friends, Mrs. Howe accompanied her husband to Washington where his duties as a member of the Commission required him to spend a great deal of time. There Mrs. Howe first came into contact with combat troops — men on active duty and with the realities of the national struggle. She saw the glowing campfires of the pickets on the Washington defense line—the “watchfires of a hundred circling camps”—and she was stirred to the depths of her soul by the constant flow of marching men, the gallop of horsemen, and the stream of ambulances bringing in the sick and wounded to the hospitals in the city. It was an entirely new and exciting experience.

A review of the troops of the Army of the Potomac was scheduled to be held on the Virginia side on November 18, and Mrs. Howe was eager to see this great military display and demonstration. A carriage was provided and, reminiscent of the stream of Washington sightseers who went out to witness the Battle of Bull Run in the previous

July, she set out, accompanied by her Boston pastor, Dr. James Freeman Clarke, and Mr. and Mrs. Edwin P. Whipple, for the scene of action. The party was disappointed. Instead of a glittering display of mounted officers galloping hither and yon and marching men with bayonets burnished like "fiery rows of steel," the maneuvers were broken up by the sudden dash of a Confederate raiding party. Instead of the gorgeous display that had been promised by General McClellan, troops were hastily detached to gallop away to the relief of a small Federal force which had been surprised and surrounded. The review was abandoned for the day.

Progress was slow on return to the city, with the roads blocked by military units and the carriages of sightseers. The men marched by, many groups sang "John Brown's Body" as they passed, in which Mrs. Howe and her friends joined. "Good for you," called out tired troopers, and this encouraged them to sing more lustily. Dr. Clarke, the Boston pastor, turned to Mrs. Howe and suggested that she write some more appropriate words to dress up the grand old air.

"I had often wished to write some words which may be sung to it," wrote Mrs. Howe. "We sang,

however, the words which were already well known as belonging to it, and our singing seemed to please the soldiers who surrounded us like a river.” Mrs. Howe and her party finally reached their room in Willard’s Hotel in Washington where, she says: “I slept as usual that night, but awoke before dawn the next morning, and soon found myself trying to weave together certain lines which, though not entirely suited to the John Brown music, were yet capable of being sung to it. I lay still in the dark room, line after line shaping itself in my mind, and verse after verse. When I had thought out the last of these I felt that I must make an effort to place them beyond the danger of being effaced by a morning nap.

“I sprang out of bed and groped about in the dim twilight to find a bit of paper and the stump of a pen which I remembered to have had the evening before. Having found these articles and having long been accustomed to scribble with scarcely any sight of what I might write in a room made dark for the repose of my infant children, I began to write the lines of my poem in like manner. . . On the occasion now spoken of, I completed writing, went back to bed and fell fast asleep.”

Thus in the dim half-light of the early dawn of November 19, 1861, the words of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" were set down on paper in a burst of inspiration that brought but little monetary reward, but earned deathless fame for the author. When Mrs. Howe died on October 17, 1910, at the ripe old age of ninety-one years, she went to her grave to the strains of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

The original manuscript which she gave to a friend has long been lost, but its form has been preserved in facsimile. It was written on two sheets of Sanitary Commission letter paper and bears the manuscript date "Nov. 1861." What is remarkable is that the poem was complete when written; only a few corrections or alterations of words were made. A sixth verse was rejected for the reason that Mrs. Howe felt it was not in consonance with the elevated spirit of the first five verses.

On her return to Boston the poem was submitted to James T. Fields, Editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, and on acceptance she was paid the princely sum of \$5 for the composition. Fields wrote the title, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," and the poem was given the place of honor on the first page of *The Atlantic* for February, 1862. Curiously

enough, though the poem was clearly the property of the magazine — or at least first printing rights — it has been discovered by James J. Fuld, New York lawyer whose avocation is the history of American music, that the poem was first given to the public through the *New York Tribune* on January 14, 1862. Publication of the February *Atlantic* came a few days later, about the 18th, according to advertisements in the Boston newspapers. The *Tribune*, no doubt, obtained its copy from advance sheets sent out by the magazine.

The poem was picked up by one newspaper after another and had in a short time widespread distribution over the entire North. Everyone knew the air, no song-plugging was necessary to make it a new hit, but it did have a tremendous sale in sheet music when Oliver Ditson & Co., of Boston, brought out an issue in early April. The official copyright record is dated April 9, 1862, and a copy of the published music was filed on the same date. The rather long title ran: "Battle Hymn of the Republic. Adapted to the Favorite Melody 'Glory, Hallelujah.' Written by Mrs. Dr. S. G. Howe, for the *Atlantic Monthly*."

"Battle Hymn" is a stately song and its lines have long outlived, at least in popular use, the "dog-

gerel" verses that gave the inspiration. It is a song for the home, the schools, for public meetings and ceremonial occasions, and though it was immensely popular during the war years it never supplanted "John Brown's Body" as the song of the soldiers on the march or in the field. Still today it holds a firm position among the national hymns and anthems.

As early as December, 1890, Theodore Roosevelt named Mrs. Howe's "Battle Hymn" as his favorite poem in a survey made by the Urbana (Ohio) *Daily Citizen*. His selection remained firm, for in 1908 during his tenure as President of the United States, he launched a movement to officially adopt the "Battle Hymn" as the national anthem to supplant the "Star Spangled Banner." Though his suggestion had many supporters the effort failed — still there are those who wish that he had been more aggressive in his campaign.

IV.

The origin of the air to which "John Brown's Body" and the "Battle Hymn" are adapted is lost in the mist of years. It was, apparently, in its first incarnation employed for secular uses such as

drinking ballads, marching songs, sailor chanteys, and the like. Some years ago Professor Bodin found an old manuscript in a Stockholm, Sweden, musical library, which probably dated before 1700, of a drinking song relating the misadventures of a sailor in Limping Lotta's saloon which was set to recognizable lines of the modern tune.

Charles Wesley, who did not believe in letting the devil have all the good tunes, heard the air on the streets of London, and after setting some churchly words to it set it out on a new career as a church song which, in America, became a standard in revivals and camp meetings. Thus, it came to America as a Methodist hymn tune, if indeed it had not been heard earlier as a sailor chantey. In fact, in its basic form it was a genuine folk-air.

The tune served as a vehicle for several sets of words, but most popular and best remembered is "Say, brothers, will you meet us?" which, in my youth, I heard many times in revival meetings held in my native West Virginia. But its popular use has not been confined to the church and the two national songs — it has been employed in scores, perhaps hundreds, of other ways for political rallying songs, campus chants, ribald rhymes,

and it has worn well for parodies and extemporized songs through all the wars. Next to “Hinky, Dinky, Parley-voo” of the soldiers in France in World War I the song most frequently heard was “All we do is sign the payroll” sung to the tune of “John Brown’s Body” — voicing a genuine note of protest; constant troop movements made paydays uncertain, even after signing two or three rolls.

The distribution of the tune is world-wide; the the Germans in World War I sang “glori, glori to the girls of sixteen, seventeen years,” and in World War II it was “Lora, Lora,” the Nazi marching song. “John Brown’s Body” has long been popular in the British Army, and with the British Legion as a personal tribute to one of its great leaders, Major General Sir John Brown. In World War II on a bright, sunny morning I was with the Australian 9th Division — the “Old Rats of Tobruk” — when they swept across the beach at the Brunei Bay landing in Borneo singing an Australian song — but the tune was “John Brown’s Body.”

It was in the 1880’s when “John Brown’s Body” and its melody seemed to be fatherless things that claims and counter-claims to its composition were made by hopefuls who sought a place in the sun.

Most persistent in urging their claims were William Steffe, of Philadelphia, Thomas Brigham Bishop, of New York, and Frank E. Jerome, of Russell, Kansas — but in each case their claims can easily be dismissed on examination of the records and proven facts. In an entirely different category are such poets as Rev. W. W. Patton, later President of Howard University; Edna Dean Proctor, H. H. Brownell, and a half dozen others who, like Mrs. Howe, wrote serious lyrics to be adapted to the melody in the hope of giving the grand old tune a more appropriate and dignified set of words. It was not their fault that uninformed writers in later years insisted that each one in turn “wrote the original John Brown song.”

The claim of Frank E. Jerome, which never got beyond the stage of some little newspaper discussion and a flock of letters written by him to the Kansas Historical Society, seems the most preposterous. He insisted that in June, 1861, at the age of twelve or thirteen years, while appearing in a variety show at Leavenworth, Kansas, he dashed off a couple of verses of the song after hearing some impassioned oratory. The music, he claimed, was composed by combining “Run, Tell Aunt Susey” and “I Love to go to Sunday School.” Of course he

was not aware that by June, 1861, the Fort Warren version was well on its way as a wartime hit, particularly in the Boston sector.

Two small books have been written to support the claim of Thomas Brigham Bishop, who had earned some reputation as a music composer and song-writer while traveling with a minstrel show in pre-war days. He said that when he returned to his home in Maine in 1858 he found that a brother-in-law had experienced religion. "When he (the brother-in-law) exclaimed 'I am bound to be a soldier in the army of the Lord; glory, glory hallelujah' without stopping to think I sang this line to a melody which seemed to escape from my mouth. . . I sang it on several occasions, adapting it to circumstances and conditions, and when at Martinsburg, Virginia, after John Brown's execution at Harpers Ferry (sic), I wrote the original lines of 'John Brown's body lies a-moldering in the grave'. . . The song was published in 1861 by John Church, of Cincinnati, Ohio."

Unfortunately for Bishop, the sheet music issue by Church did not come out until December, 1861, and when it did the first verse ran "Ellsworth's body lies a-mold'ring in the grave," with "The stars of Heaven are looking kindly down, On the

grave of poor Ellsworth” for the second verse. In fact, other than the substitution of the name of Ellsworth and insertion of the “stars of Heaven” verse the song conforms almost exactly to the first Boston penny broadside issue. At any rate, despite the two small books, (*The Composer of The Battle Hymn of the Republic*, by John J. MacIntyre, 1916, and *Glory Hallelujah*, by Katherine Little Bakeless, 1944) the Bishop claim did not get very far. Bishop died in Philadelphia on May 15, 1905.

The William Steffe myth, however, is the one that has really muddied the waters, and he is the one who has profited most — in name only — from his assertion that he composed the music of “John Brown’s Body,” later to be almost completely captured by “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” In fact his name as composer heads the music in many of the song books current today.

Whatever his private claims may have been, Steffe was not publicly credited with the composition until November 3, 1883, when Major O.C. Bosbyshell published an article entitled “Origin of ‘John Brown’s Body’ ” in *Grand Army Scout and Soldiers’ Mail*, of Philadelphia. The piece was picked up by Brander Matthews for use in his “Songs of the War,” in *Century Magazine*, August,

1887, thus putting Steffe on the road to fame. He died at his Philadelphia home on May 5, 1911.

Steffe's claim is fully set out in a series of letters written to Colonel Richard J. Hinton running from 1885 to 1887, now lodged in the Kansas Historical Society library. His story is that in 1855 or 1856 he was asked to write an air for a series of verses beginning "Say, bummers, will you meet us?" which the Good Will Engine Company, of Philadelphia, wanted to sing to welcome the Liberty Fire Company, of Baltimore, then due to pay a fraternal visit to the firemen of the Quaker City. It was the Bosbyshell claim that the air composed, set to the "Say, bummers, will you meet us?" verse, had such snap and verve that it was immediately caught up by revivalists, substituting "Say, brothers, will you meet us?" for the first verse, then carried throughout the country. But the tune was an old one when Steffe's grandfather was young; what he probably did was to pick up the old air, maybe from a sub-conscious memory, and revamp it to fit the firemen's welcoming song.

Steffe was a life-long Philadelphian. His activities can be traced through the years as a clerk, insurance agent, manager of a heating stove works, and as an active Mason for more than fifty years —

but in all the record there is no mention of him as a composer of music other than the John Brown tune. In some way most of the narrators, Major Bosbyshell excluded, have transported him to the South, usually represented as a Charleston, South Carolina, music writer, but sometimes from Richmond, Virginia — and the statement is frequently made that a Northerner (Daniel Decatur Emmet) wrote “Dixie,” the great war song of the South, and a Southerner (William Steffe?) wrote the most popular war song of the North, “John Brown’s Body.”

Anyway, Steffe has reaped a rich reward of unearned posthumous fame.

